



**TENNESSEE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**  
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**November 30, 2007**  
**Board of Commissioner's**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Commissioner's Present:**

Commissioner Blalock  
Commissioner Cocke (Phone)  
Commissioner Davis  
Commissioner Garrett  
Commissioner Hakeem  
Commissioner Osborne  
Commissioner Pierce  
Commissioner Pride  
Commissioner Smith  
Commissioner Walker  
Chairman Wiggins

**Commissioner's Absent:**

Commissioner Jones  
Commissioner Miller  
Commissioner Wurzburg

**Staff Present:**

Beverly Watts, Executive Director  
Shay Rose, General Counsel  
Robert Bright, Housing Director  
Esperanza Soriano, Communications Director  
Lisa Lancaster, Executive Director's Assistant

**Guests:**

Denise Hopgood/MHRC

**Call to Order & Invocation**

Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Commissioner Starling offered the invocation. Roll call was taken.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the October 5, 2007 board meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Osborne made a motion to accept the minutes. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

**Executive Director's Report**

Executive Director Beverly Watts updated the Board on the Rules Review and noted that Rep. Richardson voiced concerns about minors filing complaints. THRC returned to a Show Cause Hearing on November 2, 2007 and Senator Bunch requested that the Attorney General give an opinion when THRC returns to the committee in January 2008.

Executive Director Watts reported that the Sunset Hearing has been moved to January 2008 due to the Special Audit by the Comptroller not being complete. Commissioners will be notified when it is rescheduled so that they may participate.

Director Watts reported that she along with Shared Services Solutions staff attended the THRC Budget Hearing on November 6, 2007 and that all went well and there were no improvements requested.

Shared Services is working with THRC to complete the Financial Integrity 4 year review. It will be completed within the next week and submitted no later than December 31, 2007.

Outreach Events coming up are a Mortgage program in partnership with THDA, Strategic Planning, Employee Training on December 14, 2007 and preparing for Sunset and Rules Hearings.

Commissioner Hakeem made a motion to accept the report and Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

### **Nominating Committee Report**

Commissioner Pierce, Nominating Committee Chair, reported on the nominations recommended by the committee for Chair of the Board, Vice Chairs of East, Middle and West Divisions and the Secretary's positions. The committee recommended for 2008 that Spencer Wiggins be reappointed Chairman, Yusuf Hakeem, Vice Chair for East Division, Stacey Garrett, Vice Chair for Middle Division, David Cocke, Vice Chair for West Division and A.J. Starling be reappointed Secretary. Commissioner Pierce recommended approval of the slate of officers and Commissioner Garrett seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Wiggins read the resolution concerning EEOC appropriations for the 2008 federal fiscal year and requested that the board allow it to be sent to appropriate legislators. Commissioner Osborne made a motion to accept the chairs recommendation. Commissioner Hakeem seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

Chairman Wiggins read the committee assignment recommendations. Law and Legislation: Chair, Stacey Garrett, Ruby Miller, Yusuf Hakeem, David Cocke and Nathan Pride. Education and Outreach: Chair, Robin Smith, Dennis Blalock, Ralph Davis, Joseph Walker, Patricia Pierce. Budget and Audit: Chair, Yusuf Hakeem, Jocelyn Wurzburg, Edwin Osborne, A.J. Starling and Robert Jones. Commissioner Starling made a motion to accept the Chairman's recommendations. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

### **Budget & Audit Report**

Chairman Hakeem reported on the November 1, 2007 Budget & Audit Committee meeting. The function of the committee was to review the 08-09 Budget as reported by Shared Services Director, Allen Staley; discuss the Financial Integrity Review due by the end of the year; and receive an update on the Sunset Hearing preparations.

Chairman Hakeem thanked Executive Director Watts for her guidance of the committee and her presentations with the Budget process. THRC was well represented at the hearing.

Commissioner Pierce made a motion to accept the report and Commissioner Garrett seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

### **Employment Case Report**

Executive Director Watts gave the employment report in the absence of Deputy Director, Tiffany Baker Cox who gave birth to her second daughter Kayla on November 16<sup>th</sup>. It was noted that Housing and Employment Investigator in the Knoxville Office, Tara Acton has left the agency, Ritchie Patton, Employment Investigator will leave the agency in 2 weeks and Employment Investigator, Richard Sherman in the Memphis Office has gone to Shelby County Government. It was noted that because of staff changes less charges are being closed.

Director Watts reported that the Policy & Procedures Manuals reviews have been completed; Intake Officer, Dianna Ruch, will become an employment investigator in the Nashville Office in December; Knoxville will have a new Housing Investigator and Memphis will have a new Employment Investigator which only leaves one position vacant in Nashville. The Mediation Program will be restarted in February 2008 and during that month 5 staff members will attend Rule 31 Certified Mediation training. It was noted that Commissioner Wurzburg was an EEOC Mediator in Memphis.

Commissioner Davis made a motion to accept the report and Commissioner Osborne seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

### **Housing Case Report**

Housing Director, Robert Bright, reported that since September 2007, 19 new charges have been received and 13 cases have been closed. It was noted that the majority of the incoming complaints are race based cases. Housing Director noted that Jennifer Gibson would report for duty as a housing investigator the first of December.

Case aging is about 150 days per case which is down from recent months. Commissioner Osborne asked what the standard case age was. Director Bright reported that HUD's standard is 100 days.

Chairman Wiggins was interested in knowing why the turnover in employees in the Knoxville Housing Office. Director Bright noted that investigators were offered other jobs and opportunities.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to accept the housing report and Commissioner Hakeem seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed

### **Legal Report**

Shay Rose, General Counsel, reported that legal reviewed 47 employment cases last month and 35 cases this month for a total of 82 employment cases. Eight (8) housing cases were reviewed in Legal. General Counsel Rose made an appeal to the Commissioners for applicants for Assistant Counsel noting that ads have been run in the

City Paper and on the THRC website. The position is Executive Service and requires 1 year of experience.

The internal audit required by State Audit of investigative files is complete and Rules Hearing has been continued until January 2008.

Legal also has 2 pre-cause cases that are pregnancy related, gender issues, national origin (Hispanic). Deputy Director Tiffany Cox was assisting by mediating a housing case which was successful for \$2,000 and training.

Commissioners engaged in a discussion addressing the personnel changes at THRC and what some possible answers available to the agency might be from keeping current investigators on track with targeted closure goals and using staff support to assist where appropriate.

Commissioner Pierce made a motion to accept the legal report and Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

### **Outreach and Education**

Esperanza Soriano, Communications Director, reported that THRC participated in 7 outreach activities since the last meeting. Activities include sharing agency brochures and speaking engagements at Scarritt Bennett Center, St. Phillips Catholic Church and Executive Direct Watts spoke at the Road to Freedom event in Nashville.

Ms. Soriano reported that 2008 will be busy with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in January, Black History Month in February and the Fair Housing Anniversary in April and a proposal to HUD for the \$40,000 Katrina Funds is due this week.

Commissioner Pride noted he would like to be kept informed of the outreach and education events in the West Tennessee area and provided agency brochures. Ms. Soriano noted that we often partner with the West Tennessee Legal Services, the NAACP and other agencies in the area for outreach events.

Chairman Wiggins added that anytime his services are needed he is happy to speak at events or attend activities if it can be worked into his schedule. Please feel free to invite him and provide speaking points.

Commissioner Garrett made a motion to accept the Communications report. Commissioner Pride seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed.

Executive Director Watts updated the Commission on the lease space issue. It was noted that proposals will be accepted by Real Property on December 19, 2007 and an update would be given at the January meeting. A customer service survey is being developed to track how our service to the public is and what we can do to improve. It was noted that we would return to Rules Hearings in January and Director Watts would meet with Senator Bunch in order to assist him understand how THRC handles cases of minors filing complaints.

Commissioner Pierce thanked the Nominations Committee members for their hard work and dedication to this Commission.

Chairman Wiggins wished the Commission and staff a wonderful Thanksgiving and noted that THRC provides a service to the community 365 days a year and thanked all for being a part of the service and for having a passion for things being done right.

With no further business to address, Chairman Wiggins adjourned the meeting at 10:05 a.m.